



**City of Bloomington
Environmental Commission**

July 6, 2004

To: City of Bloomington Mayor Mark Kruzan
Bloomington Common Council
Bloomington Plan Commission

From: Bloomington Environmental Commission

The Bloomington Growth Policies Plan, as revised in 2003, mandates revisions to the City's Zoning Ordinance to protect natural resources in several ways. The GPP's introduction points out "...it is clear that [our] citizens place a higher priority on preserving greenspace than on encouraging further residential and commercial growth of undeveloped property." The Nurture Environmental Integrity section recommends the following zoning ordinance revisions which would expand the current level of protection of environmentally sensitive areas:

NEI-2 and NEI-3. Update the karst ordinance to reflect scientifically accepted karst protection practices and require karst features to be protected by conservation easements. (A likely revision under this would address preservation of clusters of sinkholes as a unit.)

NEI-4. Establish a tree preservation ordinance that would emphasize species diversity, protect blocks of high quality vegetation and natural corridors, and preserve community-wide tree crown coverage.

NEI-9. Develop regulations that require water quality best management practices for controlling stormwater runoff.

NEI-12. Revise the water resource regulations in the Zoning Ordinance to protect water resources using graduated buffer zones to prohibit or limit development in sensitive and streamside transition zones. (The current ordinance buffer zone protection width is 25 feet; these changes could expand the protected width to as much as 100 feet in certain areas.)

NEI-14. Coordinate with the City Utilities Department to strengthen regulatory controls for post-development stormwater runoff rates.

NEI-15. Revise Zoning and Subdivision regulations to require areas within 100 year floodways as well as intermittent stream channels to be protected by conservation easements.

NEI-19. Revise Zoning and Subdivision regulations for sites having environmental constraints to better protect such features as wetlands, steep slopes and water resources.

The Critical Subareas section identifies certain subareas as having environmental constraints that must be considered in development of those areas.

There is good logic backed by sound science to support the GPP's proposals for enhanced natural resource conservation. Greenspace contains permeable surfaces which provide free storage of flood water and treatment of storm water runoff. Forests moderate temperature and absorb CO2 emissions. Some karst features support endangered species and unique assemblages of cave fauna, which may be adversely affected by surface development. Surface karst features also conduct untreated storm drainage, along with all the pollutants it contains, directly to our streams, lakes, springs and drinking water supply wells.

The GPP provided for a 1-2 year time frame for all of these revisions, which would expire in November of this year. The zoning ordinance revisions have taken longer than anticipated in the GPP. In the interim period we are experiencing a rapid influx of petitions for development of sensitive areas. New developments have been proposed in 7 of the 12 critical subareas, and several have been approved. Looking at the City's recently completed Environmental Resource Inventory, we find that 5 new developments have been proposed in areas with the highest sensitivity ratings during or since the completion of the new GPP. These include the Southern Indiana Medical Park, the Burchfield development at Jackson Creek, the Mill Creek project in the Wapehani area, and two parcels in the Twin Lakes area (Forest Ridge and Copper Beech).

The following development proposals contain sensitive environmental features which would receive additional protections after the Zoning Ordinance revisions are in effect:

Burchfield (streams, floodplain, high-quality forest, steep slopes)

Mill Creek at Wapehani (stream, floodplain, wetlands, high-quality forest, steep slopes)

Southern Indiana Medical Park (streams, floodplain, high-quality forest, steep slopes, karst features)

Renwick (stream, floodplain, high-quality forest, steep slopes)

Timber Ridge (high quality forest, steep slopes, high-quality karst features)

Copper Beech (high quality forest, steep slopes, high-quality karst features)

Shadow Creek (stream, forested floodplain)

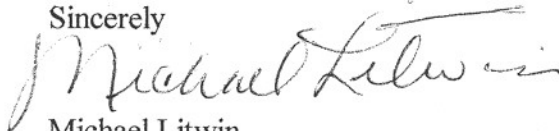
The Bloomington Environmental Commission has the statutory responsibility of advising the City on environmental matters. The Commission provided substantial input into the GPP revision

process, much of which was included in the final text of the Nurture Environmental Integrity section. The Environmental Commission is becoming increasingly concerned that a significant amount of our sensitive natural resource areas will already be developed before the zoning ordinance revisions are completed. This will result in substantially reduced protection for native forest, steep slopes, karst features and streams, in comparison to what the GPP mandates, and compromises all of the effort and foresight that went into the GPP process. In our opinion this is not good planning.

In view of these concerns, the Environmental Commission recommends that the Bloomington Common Council establish a moratorium on new development proposals in environmentally sensitive areas until the zoning ordinance update process has been completed. We recommend that this moratorium apply to areas with a City of Bloomington Environmental Resource Inventory (COBERI) rating of 3 or higher.

Please devote your full consideration to this issue, and give Bloomington's valuable natural resources the protection promised in the Growth Policies Plan.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michael Litwin".

Michael Litwin

Chair, Bloomington Environmental Commission